



Interview Summary: Interim Chief Jason Bellaire (Windsor Police Service)

Interim Chief Jason Bellaire was interviewed by Frank Au, Mark Pritchard, Eric Brousseau, and Misha Boutilier on August 15, 2022. Questions about this summary should be directed to Eric Brousseau.

Background

Jason Bellaire is the Interim Chief of the Windsor Police Service (**WPS**). In this role, he oversees 502 sworn WPS officers, as well as numerous civilian employees. He was serving as Deputy Chief – Operations when the Ambassador Bridge was blockaded in February 2022. In that role, he provided governance and oversight of WPS operations and liaised with then-WPS Chief Pamela Mizuno, the Windsor City Council, and the Windsor Police Services Board (**Windsor PSB**). Interim Chief Bellaire has served with WPS since 1995 in a variety of operational roles, including as staff sergeant of the Emergency Services Branch and as the inspector in charge of the patrol division. He took the Ontario Provincial Police (**OPP**) Critical Incident Commander (**CIC**) course in 2017.

WPS Public Order Policing Framework

WPS had not experienced major political protests or public order events prior to the blockade of the Ambassador Bridge. It did not have a protest policy *per se*, and its officers were not trained on the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police's National Framework for Police Preparedness for Demonstrations and Assemblies. Instead, WPS's primary protest experience was policing organized labour action incidents (strikes), and WPS has a policy related to these. Interim Chief Bellaire indicated that organized labour strikes are more prescribed and predictable, and that WPS was able to police these strikes effectively due to strong community relationships.

WPS lacked a public order unit (**POU**). WPS's large/demonstration/protest policy falls within its Public Order Unit directive that speaks to an agreement with OPP pursuant to which OPP would provide assistance in the event of a public order emergency. WPS did not have a unit designated as a Public Liaison Team or Provincial Liaison Team (**PLT**), but it did assign officers who were certified crisis negotiators or selected for their personality and experience to serve as liaison officers in relation to specific events.

Pre-Arrival Planning and Intelligence

WPS has a dedicated Criminal Intelligence Bureau (the **Bureau**) that networks with other Canadian police services. Before February 3, the Bureau monitored social media to search for corroborated and compelling information of convoy activity in Windsor. If the Bureau observed impactful social media posts promoting an upcoming protest, WPS would connect with the person who made the post to obtain event details, facilitate lawful protest, and warn organizers about the consequences of unlawful conduct. WPS is also a member of the OPP-led Project Hendon public order intelligence sharing network. WPS Superintendent (now Deputy Chief) Jason Crowley liaised with Project Hendon and



shared Hendon reports directly with senior WPS leadership. Before February 3, neither the Bureau's intelligence gathering nor Project Hendon reports indicated that any convoy activity was likely to occur in Windsor.

On February 3, WPS learned on social media and confirmed with protest organizers that protestors were planning a "slow-roll" demonstration in Windsor. Slow-roll protests involve trucks or other vehicles driving below the speed limit to slow the course of traffic. WPS had policed slow-roll anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown protests since 2021. These protests had generally been peaceful and lawful, WPS officers had a good relationship with the organizers that WPS used to facilitate lawful protest, and WPS aimed to avoid a hardline response that could galvanize aggressive action by protestors. WPS did not expect that the February 2022 slow-roll would be different. WPS created an operational plan for the slow-roll that aimed to provide enough staffing to monitor the event and ensure safety and security.

WPS Initial Interactions with the Protestors on February 6

On February 6, the slow roll protestors gathered at Mic Mac Park and WPS began liaising with OPP, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (**RCMP**), Canadian Border Services Agency (**CBSA**), and Public Works and Procurement Canada (**PSPC**).

That same day, three WPS liaison officers who engaged with the slow-roll protestors observed a larger gathering of vehicles than WPS was used to. Protestors responded aggressively to the WPS liaison officers and forced them to retreat to their vehicles. This was the first time that slow-roll protestors had responded aggressively to WPS officers. WPS did not revisit the operational plan in response. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that the protestors' aggressive conduct was an isolated incident and was not endorsed by all protestors.

WPS also learned on February 6 that the protestors had threatened to block the Ambassador Bridge if their demands to lift vaccine mandates were not met. This intelligence came from WPS liaison officers' conversations with protestors. WPS shared this intelligence with Project Hendon. Interim Chief Bellaire stated that at this time the protestors were still cooperating with WPS to some degree, and had not taken any overt actions to effect the blockade. Interim Chief Bellaire opined that WPS could have attempted to set up a perimeter and limit access to the Ambassador Bridge as OPP did with the Blue Water Bridge in Sarnia, and that WPS had authority to establish roadblocks under the *Highway Traffic Act*. However, he stated that he was reluctant to interfere with the flow of traffic to and from the bridge in the absence of compelling intelligence because of the importance of the bridge to international trade.

The Blockade and WPS Response

Protestors blocked the Ambassador Bridge on February 7 in the early evening. Protestors stated that they would not leave the Ambassador Bridge until Canadian governments agreed to eliminate all vaccine mandates. Protestors also targeted the towing company the WPS had contracted with and used to tow a couple of cars from the protest by tying



up its phone lines with calls and intimidating employees by telling them that the company had to take a side between police and protestors.

Interim Chief Bellaire stated that WPS did not have a response plan when the bridge was first shut down because WPS had never experienced an event like that before. He explained that no one had ever previously tried to exploit the lack of security at critical infrastructure in Windsor.

WPS sought assistance from other police services starting with Chatham-Kent and LaSalle police and local OPP officers on February 7. WPS had requested OPP PLT assistance by February 8, and also requested and received POU officers from OPP, RCMP, and the London, Hamilton, and Waterloo Regional Police Services by February 10. Interim Chief Bellaire estimated that OPP had 500 officers cycling through Windsor at one point.

WPS also coordinated with CBSA. When CBSA notified WPS that keeping trucks on the Ambassador Bridge was dangerous to its structural integrity, WPS negotiated with protestors to arrange for vehicles to exit and CBSA officers facilitated that exit. CBSA officers also facilitated traffic flow during periods when emergency lanes were open.

Interim Chief Bellaire described the protestors as difficult to negotiate with because there were multiple groups of protestors and their leaders changed frequently. He described an instance in which WPS negotiated with one group of protestors to leave some lanes open at the bridge, only for another group to block those lanes. The OPP PLT team informed WPS that the protestors were so unstructured and their leadership so fragile that it was difficult to reach agreements or prevent agreements reached from falling apart. Interim Chief Bellaire's view was that the protestors' loose organization made their behaviour unpredictable. Interim Chief Bellaire further observed that the protestors became more aggressive at night due to alcohol consumption. Officers accordingly avoided engaging with protestors at night so as not to stimulate violence.

[The Critical Incident Command System and Shared Command with OPP](#)

On February 7, WPS set up its Emergency Operations Centre (**EOC**) and appointed Superintendent Crowley as CIC. As CIC, Crowley commanded WPS and assisting officers from other police forces until February 10. On that date, WPS and OPP established a shared command between the WPS CIC and the OPP's CIC; other assisting police forces did not share command decision-making. The shared command operated out of the same physical space in the EOC, and the two CICs and their command staff occupied a closed room in the EOC's central area. Crowley and the OPP's CIC exercised control of ground operations.

Interim Chief Bellaire explained that the shared command assigned planning and command responsibility for a given operation to the CIC whose police force was leading the operation. For instance, the OPP CIC was responsible for the public order plan and enforcement operation because the OPP provided a POU unit, which WPS did not have. The OPP CIC still discussed OPP-led operations with the WPS CIC, who agreed to those



operations and ensured that WPS performed its role. The OPP and WPS CICs either jointly briefed officers or had a single CIC conduct the briefing.

Interim Chief Bellaire explained that WPS leadership supported OPP taking command of the public order plan and enforcement operation. His view was that OPP were the subject matter experts at public order policing, were better equipped to take command, and that it was appropriate for OPP to do so because OPP was providing the bulk of the POU assets. He stated that there were no WPS-OPP rivalries at the executive and command level, and that any lower-level rivalries were minor. He explained that WPS's primary concern was to protect the community, not to protect its turf or avoid losing face to another police force.

Interim Chief Bellaire also explained that he respected the CICs' autonomy and avoided interfering in their decision-making. He stated that the CIC system is designed to "prevent paralysis through analysis" by letting the CICs run the operation without interference from their police superiors. In his view, the CICs were the subject matter experts who should be making decisions, and the CIC system provided them with centralized situational awareness and assessment resources to make those decisions effectively. Interim Chief Bellaire saw his role as Deputy Chief to provide higher-level oversight and assist the CICs in obtaining permissions from the City of Windsor (the **City**). He told the CICs that they were 100% in charge even when Interim Chief Bellaire was visiting the EOC command room. The CICs would inform Interim Chief Bellaire in advance of a projected operation so that he could inform Chief Mizuno, but he did not direct operations.

The Windsor City Council and the Windsor PSB were kept informed but did not interfere with the CICs' decision-making. Interim Chief Bellaire provided high-level briefings to both Council and the Windsor PSB to inform them that a plan was in place, that operations were expected, and that there would be a budgetary impact, but he did not share more granular operational details with them. Interim Chief Bellaire also stressed that the operation would take as long as necessary and did not provide projections of when it would end. Interim Chief Bellaire and WPS never asked the Windsor PSB to approve operational decisions. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that his view was that the Windsor PSB should provide oversight and governance, but does not have a say in operations.

[The Effect of the Superior Court Injunction and Provincial Emergency Declaration](#)

On February 11, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice granted the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association's motion for an injunction prohibiting a blockade of the Ambassador Bridge. Interim Chief Bellaire swore an affidavit in support of the injunction motion. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that the injunction assisted the police to clear the blockade in three ways. First, it communicated to protestors and the public that the protestors' actions were unlawful. Second, it allowed police to charge protestors with another *Criminal Code* charge—disobeying a court order—in addition to mischief. Third, it enabled police to prevent protestors from gathering in areas near the pathways to the bridge; Interim Chief Bellaire explained that the *Criminal Code* and *Highway Traffic Act* only authorized police to arrest protestors who gathered on the pathways themselves.



On February 11, the Premier of Ontario declared a province-wide emergency under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that the provincial emergency declaration provided helpful towing authorities, but did not assist the WPS to clear the blockade because the primary reasonable grounds under the *Criminal Code* were already well established.

The Public Order Plan and Enforcement Operation

By February 11, the OPP CIC had completed preparation of a public order plan to clear the Ambassador Bridge. Interim Chief Bellaire estimated that it took the OPP several days to prepare the plan. OPP, WPS, and other assisting police services began an enforcement action to implement the public order plan on February 12, and completed clearing the bridge by February 13. The OPP, RCMP, London, Waterloo, and Hamilton POU units took the leading role in the operation, and WPS officers assisted in the background and periphery. City staff reset the traffic lights after POU officers cleared the bridge, and the bridge was then reopened shortly after midnight on February 14. Small pockets of protestors remained in the periphery. The police secured a very long corridor leading up to the bridge, and did not allow for intersecting traffic east or west of the bridge.

Interim Chief Bellaire expressed his opinion that the operation went according to plan and was a success. The police cleared the bridge professionally and no one was hurt or injured. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that members of the US media complemented him on the police's professionalism and how the police were able to resolve the blockade without escalating the situation.

Interim Chief Bellaire attributed the operation's success to the methodical and cautious approach the police took. He stated that his guiding principle was to seek the most peaceful, community safety-oriented resolution possible. He explained that, while the police could have cleared the Ambassador Bridge in less than half an hour, doing so would have risked injury and inflaming the protests and would have been contrary to WPS values. Instead, the police prioritized communication to avoid escalation. In his view, the police's patient approach and efforts to negotiate with protestors helped ensure public support for the police enforcement action, especially when negotiations proved unsuccessful or protestors failed to honour agreements with police. Interim Chief Bellaire also credited the police's ability to staff the plan for the plan's success.

The Aftermath of the Blockade

After the bridge was cleared, OPP and assisting officers from other police forces were redeployed out of Windsor and WPS assumed responsibility for securing the bridge. WPS maintained a secure perimeter until March 28 to prevent a resurgence of protestor activity. Interim Chief Bellaire described this as an expensive and exhausting exercise that led to between \$5.5-7 million in costs and required WPS to cancel off days to meet staffing needs. WPS subsequently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Windsor Police Association to compensate members who worked excessive hours. Interim Chief Bellaire explained that simultaneously securing the Ambassador Bridge and policing Windsor left WPS's resources stretched thin.



Lessons and Recommendations for the Future

Interim Chief Bellaire identified numerous lessons from the Ambassador Bridge blockade that WPS has learned and, in some cases, already begun to act on. These lessons include the following:

- 1) Develop a standing plan to secure the Ambassador Bridge and other critical border infrastructure in the event of a protest or public order event.
 - WPS has developed this plan and has the ability to quickly disseminate it.
- 2) Create POU and PLT units.
 - WPS is working with the Windsor PSB to establish a POU and create the corresponding policies. Interim Chief Bellaire stated that national and local circumstances necessitated creating a POU unit.
 - Deputy Chief Crowley is looking at how to develop a PLT team within WPS.
- 3) Ensure police leadership presence on scene and in staging area as well as in command post.
 - Interim Chief Bellaire explained that it is advantageous to maintain a beacon of leadership on scene and in the staging area. He stated that he would drive down to the Ambassador Bridge and visit WPS personnel in the early mornings.
- 4) Develop better internal and external communications.
 - Interim Chief Bellaire reported that front-line officers and community members were critical of WPS for not clearing the blockade more rapidly, and that WPS should have communicated the reasons for its methodical approach more clearly.
 - WPS has established a corporate communications unit capable of handling internal and external communications during a public order event.
- 5) Take proactive approach to staffing and improve collaboration with Windsor Police Association.
 - Interim Chief Bellaire stated that WPS should have had an officer dedicated to managing staffing before the staffing situation became critical.
 - Interim Chief Bellaire also observed that WPS had a poor relationship with the Windsor Police Association at the time of the blockade, but has now begun to work better with the Association.
- 6) Integrate community impact considerations into planning.



- Interim Chief Bellaire observed that police planning must account for the impact of protests on the community in addition to public safety and the right to protest under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. He stated that WPS now intends to consider community impact when assessing the appropriate police response to protest.
- Interim Chief Bellaire also observed that, due to the unprecedented nature of the blockade, WPS plans did not initially account for the potential for protest to disrupt the continuity of services and business and the transportation of essential medical supplies.

Interim Chief Bellaire also observed that greater federal planning investment in protecting Windsor's critical border infrastructure is desirable. By 2026, Windsor will have four major border crossings: two bridges, a train tunnel, and a vehicle tunnel. Interim Chief Bellaire was unaware of any federal investment in the protection and security of these crossings and tunnels aside from behind-the-scenes intelligence units. He observed that because WPS only has 500 officers, WPS would need to ask for external assistance if a similar blockade occurred in the future and noted that WPS's staffing resources were exhausted in 48 hours by a blockade of only a single small location. Interim Chief Bellaire questioned whether it was appropriate for WPS to be designated the proprietor of community safety at international border crossings, and whether Windsor local taxpayers should bear the tax burden of ensuring those crossings' security.